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191004Z Sep 02

2002HANOI02277 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	ACQ-00	CIAE-00	PERC-00	DS-00	FBIE-00
	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-00	VCE-00	MED-07	DCP-01
	NSAE-00	PM-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	NFAT-00
	SAS-00	/010W					

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7588
INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE IMMEDIATE
SECDEF WASHDC
JCS WASHDC
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L HANOI 002277

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV

SECDEF FOR ISA/ACHAO

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/12

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [MARR](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: FEAR AND LOATHING AT MINISTRY OF DEFENSE
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REF: A. HANOI 2272 B. HANOI 1189

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RAYMOND BURGHARDT,
REASON: 1.5 (D)

2. (C) IN A DISCUSSION WITH AMBASSADOR AND POL/C ON
SEPTEMBER 18, COLONEL TRAN NHUNG (PROTECT), DIRECTOR OF
THE INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF QUAN DOI NHAN DAN (THE
"PEOPLE'S ARMY" NEWSPAPER), CONFIRMED REF A SPECULATION
THAT MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE GENERAL TRA WOULD NOT
TRAVEL TO THE U.S. IN 2002. HE CLAIMED THAT THE
MILITARY LEADERSHIP HAD DECIDED THAT GENERAL TRA WAS
"TOO BUSY" TO GO THIS YEAR, ESPECIALLY GIVEN ONGOING
"PROBLEMS" IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. WHEN ASKED
WHETHER THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SECURITY DID NOT PLAY
THE PREDOMINANT SECURITY ROLE IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS,
COLONEL NHUNG INSISTED THAT MND RETAINED A "VERY
IMPORTANT ROLE" IN THAT TROUBLED REGION. COLONEL NHUNG
ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT MINISTER TRA WOULD PROBABLY
NONETHELESS VISIT THE U.S. SOMETIME IN 2003. HE NOTED
THAT MINISTER TRA WAS ONLY EXPECTED TO REMAIN IN HIS
POSITION FOR TWO YEARS, DESPITE HIS RE-ELECTION AT THE
RECENT 11TH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY INAUGURAL MEETING. TRA
AND PRIME MINISTER PHAN VAN KHAI WOULD BOTH RETIRE IN
2004, HE PREDICTED. (NOTE: MANY OTHER INFORMED
OBSERVERS HAVE MADE THE SAME ASSESSMENT. END NOTE)

3. (C) COLONEL NHUNG DESCRIBED ONE OF THE MAJOR
PROBLEMS IN US-VIETNAM RELATIONS AS "FEAR" OF THE U.S.
BY SENIOR MND OFFICIALS. HE CLAIMED THAT "WHENEVER YOU
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SEE A POSITIVE EDITORIAL ON THE U.S., THAT
REFLECTS MY VIEWS; WHENEVER IT IS NEGATIVE, THAT COMES
FROM THE MINISTRY'S LEADERSHIP." HE ADMITTED THAT THE
MND WOULD NEVER ALLOW PUBLICATION IN QDND OF AN OP ED
PIECE WRITTEN BY THE AMBASSADOR. (NOTE: QDND EDITOR-
IN-CHIEF TOLD AMBASSADOR MAY 9 THAT HIS NEWSPAPER WOULD
WELCOME PAS-PRODUCED MATERIALS, AS LONG AS THEY FIT
GENERAL EDITORIAL POLICY -- REF B.) ONE MAJOR REASON
FOR ANTI-U.S. SENTIMENT WAS CONCERN ABOUT THE
DIMINISHING ROLE OF THE MND, HE SAID. HE CLAIMED THAT
MND LEADERS BELIEVED THAT CONTINUED ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT -- AND CORRESPONDINGLY HIGHER LEVELS OF
TRADE AND INVESTMENT WITH THE U.S. -- WOULD FURTHER
WEAKEN MND'S INFLUENCE WITHIN THE GVN. HE DISMISSED AS
IRRELEVANT COMPARISONS WITH THE PRC, WHERE DEFENSE
OFFICIALS HAD OVER THE PAST DECADE PARLAYED GREATER
LEVELS OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY INTO HIGHER BUDGETS FOR

NATIONAL DEFENSE AND ACQUISITION OF MORE SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SYSTEMS.

14. (C) COMMENT: AN OFTEN FRANK INTERLOCUTOR OUTSIDE THE EARSHOT OF HIS COLLEAGUES, COLONEL NHUNG UNWITTINGLY ECHOED VICE FOREIGN MINISTER LE VAN BANG'S REMARKS TO AMBASSADOR (REF A) THAT BOTH SIDES NEED TO MAKE SURE THEIR RESPECTIVE MILITARIES WERE ON BOARD AS DIPLOMATS SOUGHT FURTHER TO IMPROVE BILATERAL TIES. IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT SUSPICION AND CONSERVATISM REMAIN THE HALLMARKS OF MANY SENIOR MND OFFICIALS, DESPITE WHAT HAS BECOME ROUTINELY GOOD COOPERATION WITH THE US MILITARY ON THE SEARCH FOR MISSING-IN-ACTION, MEDICAL RESEARCH, AND DEMINING. INTERESTINGLY, COLONEL NHUNG

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DID NOT CITE WAR MEMORIES AS ONE OF THE FACTORS IN MND NEGATIVISM VIS--VIS THE U.S., BUT THIS LIKELY REMAINS AN ISSUE FOR THE ELDER GENERATION OF ACTIVE AND RETIRED GENERALS. BUILDING UP OUR MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONSHIP WITH VIETNAM TO MORE NORMAL LEVELS IS AND MUST BE A KEY GOAL FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS, BUT IT WILL NOT BE AN EASY TASK. NASCENT MILITARY COOPERATION WITHIN THE ASEAN FRAMEWORK, AS WELL AS NEW US-ASEAN COOPERATION IN MANY FORMS AGAINST TERRORISM, MAY PROVE TO BE HELPFUL BUILDING BLOCKS IN ADDITION TO OUR UNILATERAL EFFORTS.
BURGHARDT

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